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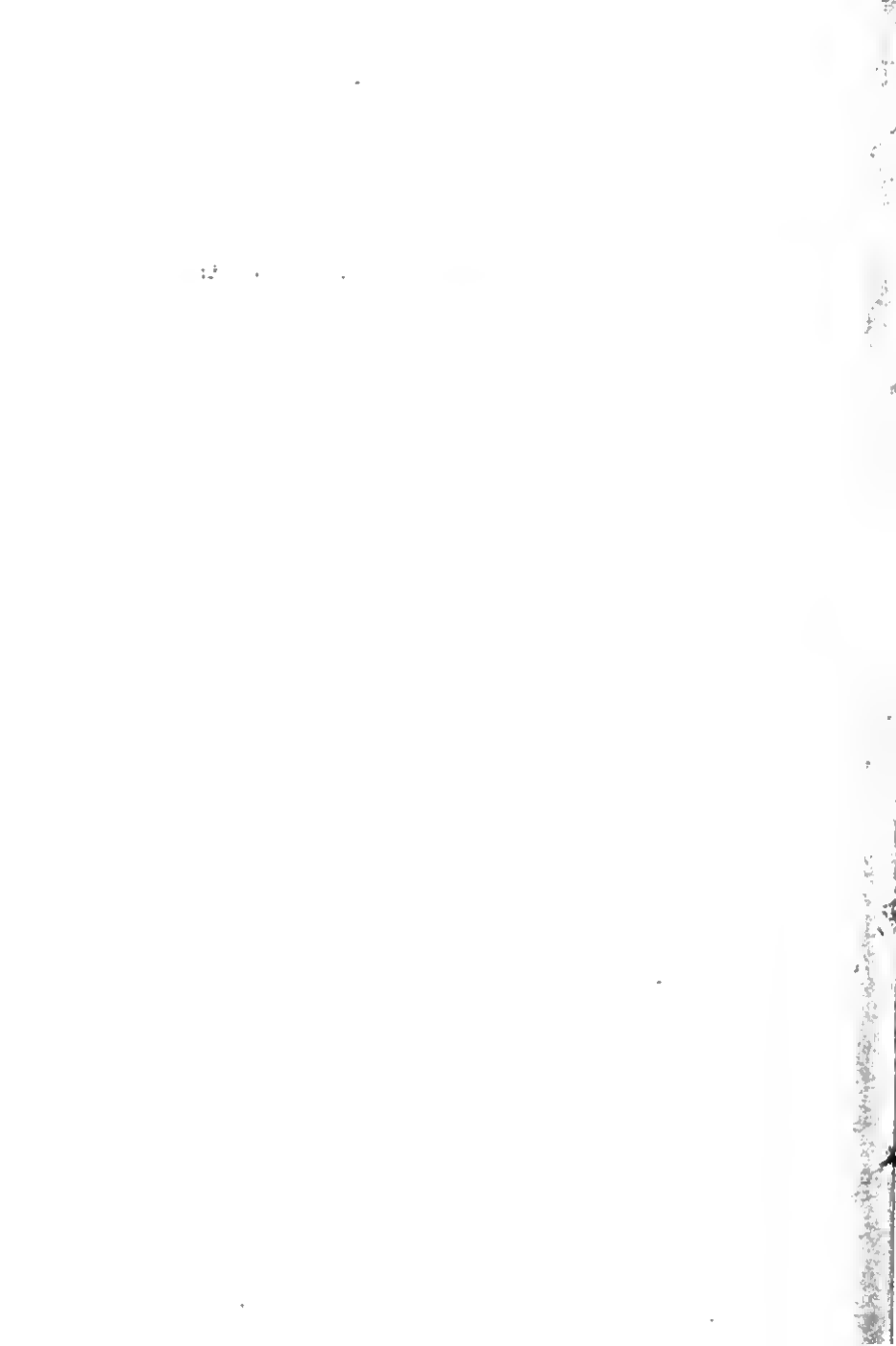
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THE QUINTESSENCE OF ISLAM



# THE QUINTESSENCE OF ISLAM

A summary of the commentary of MAULANA  
ABUL KALAM AZAD on AL-FATEHA, the first  
chapter of the Quran

by ASHFAQUE HUSAIN



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TO  
I





## Preface

WHEN A PERSON who has no claim to scholarship or even to be considered a competent student of Islam offers a tract with the ambitious title "The Quintessence of Islam", a word of explanation is called for.

In my endeavour to understand the Quran, I have read a number of translations and commentaries and the one which I have found stimulating and rewarding above all others is Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's *Tarjumanul Quran*. Quite apart from its literary excellence, the lucid and illuminating commentary on the opening chapter of the Quran is a masterpiece by any standard. It has certainly helped at least one of its readers to understand the full meaning of that chapter and the teaching of the Quran as a whole far better than he could have done otherwise. It is unfortunate therefore that it is not so far available in any other language except Urdu. An adequate English translation will be a most valuable addition to Islamic literature in the English language.

Meanwhile it appeared to me that an English summary of the commentary may be of some interest and profit to those who wish to understand the main spiritual teachings of Islam and are unable to read the original. I wish that someone more competent had attempted this task. All that I have at-

tempted to do is to present merely a simple resume of the argument, without trying to convey anything of the literary style or scholarly content of the original. I am grateful to Maulana Saheb for generously permitting me to take this liberty with the text, but this does not imply that he has authorised or approved this Summary; the responsibility for any shortcomings in presentation is entirely mine. I am indeed fully conscious that this Summary does not at all do justice to the original; and I can therefore only hope that it may at least in some measure help the lay reader to understand the real teaching of the Quran so that he may be able to distinguish it from what so often goes by the name of Islam.

I have not attempted, in this brief tract, to present a comprehensive picture of Islam, of its social code or even of its distinguishing features. It was suggested by a valued friend that I should at least deal with Islam's notable contribution to the conception and practice of democracy and brotherhood. It was a tempting suggestion but it would have altered the scope and purpose of this work, which is but a short account of the spiritual teachings of Islam, based on Maulana Saheb's commentary on the opening chapter of the Quran.

ASHFAQUE HUSAIN

New Delhi

November 29th 1957

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## *Introduction to the Second Edition*

PERHAPS THE MOST distinguishing trait of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's personality was his extraordinary individualism, an individualism which took birth and grew in spite of a tradition-laden parentage and upbringing and which remained unshaken by the pressures of public life in the midst of which he spent most of his seventy eventful years. It was a supreme example of the triumph of mind and character over circumstances.

He was born in 1888 and was given the name of Mohiuddin Ahmad, which was, however, forgotten before he was twentyfive years old. By then he had already become a national figure and his self-assumed name of Abul Kalam Azad had become almost a legend. He was the son of a learned divine with a considerable following and it was taken for granted that the young scion would one day succeed to his father's position. His training was directed to that end and his quite unusual natural gifts not only confirmed the assumption that he would inherit his father's large religious following but also held out promise that he would be a great divine. He received his education entirely at home, along traditional lines and under his father's supervision. His progress was so phenomenal that by the time he was fourteen he had mastered Persian and Arabic and passed from the status of pupil to that of teacher.

Young Mohiuddin Ahmad had, however, a mind of his own. He was not content to be a scholarly teacher or a learned theologian. His vision was far broader. He had strong literary tastes—he started a magazine of poetry at the age of sixteen—and an innate enlightenment that would not be contained by tradition or fashion, and he was more interested in the destiny of man than in the personal glory of scholastic or theological eminence. This explains the Maulana's answer of silence to the oft-repeated wistful criticism that, because of his political activities, he deprived scholarship and learning of the contribution that his natural gifts warranted and which it is given to so few to make. The Maulana chose instead the path of an enlightened humanist, retaining his individuality but discharging his responsibilities as a member of the society in which he lived and serving his fellow-men according to his best judgment and in all ways that he was capable of.

And so it was that he threw himself into the struggle for the country's freedom, and in 1912 he brought out a journal *Al-Hilal* which took the country by storm. The nationalism he preached ran counter to the prevailing trends in the Muslim community to which the journal was primarily addressed, and at the same time it naturally evoked the wrath of the British Government. In 1914, he became a political detenu and *Al-Hilal* came to an end. Within its brief career of two years, however, its fiery eloquence had brought about turmoil in the

thinking of Indian Muslims and it had fed the fire of nationalism in a lasting measure. Even at this distance of time the very mention of *Al-Hilal* inspires a feeling of warmth and awe. It is alike a highlight of the political literature of Indian nationalism and a permanent contribution to Urdu literature.

During his first detention, he was prevailed upon by a friend to write an autobiography, which he called *Tazkirah*. The result was, however, very unsatisfying to the publisher, for it did not contain the sensational events of the Maulana's own life; instead, it surveyed the background of his life and thought and was only a piece of scintillating but unsensational literature. From then onwards the ever increasing demands of the national struggle to which the Maulana had dedicated himself took a heavy toll of his time and energy, and scholarship and literary writing took a second place. Scholarship remained of course to the end of his life his first and last love but the fruits of his scholarship and literary genius could be available to others only when Government chose to give him leisure in prison. So it was that in the last forty years and more of his life he could write but two books, *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* and *Ghubar-i-Khatir*. Either of these, however, is sufficient to give its author a permanent place in Urdu literature. When he died in 1958, his mourning fellow-citizens crowded in their hundreds of thousands to pay homage to a selfless upright patriot, and it was a rare demonstra-



tion of popular affection and respect not easily to be forgotten. But long after it is forgotten and even long after the Maulana's great services in the cause of national freedom and reconstruction pass into cold history, the fiery and eloquent editor of *Al-Hilal*, the brilliant letter writer, story teller and essayist of *Ghubar-i-Khatir* and the learned translator and commentator of *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* will continue to shine in the living world of literature, learning and scholarship.

The strong uncompromising individualism, coupled with a lively sense of his duty to the society of which he was a member, that was the key to his political career also marked his work as a writer and scholar. While, to appreciate his literary style, one will no doubt turn to his prodigious performance, *Al-Hilal*, and his last masterpiece, *Ghubar-i-Khatir*, *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* is no less a work of literature than one of scholarship. It is marked by the same spontaneity and directness, the same aesthetic appeal and intellectual force which are characteristic of his other writings. The style is so simple and direct that what he says goes home at once to a person of even moderate education, and yet its literary flavour is such as to give the reader the same intoxicating pleasure that one derives from a poem rich with original ideas, dressed in beautiful words and, at the same time, the intellectual content satisfies and stimulates the most discriminating seeker of knowledge. It is these manifold qualities of *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* which give it such a pre-

eminent place among all the translations and commentaries of the Quran so far published in any language. In order, however, to appreciate its value fully, it is necessary to remember that, while it is useful to anyone who desires an understanding of the Quran and of the basic message of Islam, it was written primarily for Indian Muslims at a time when they were caught in a vortex of mental confusion.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were disastrous for Indian Muslims. Their political dominance crumbled away and, with that, the very foundations of their social and economic life were shaken. The new conditions demanded large scale adjustments and the Indian Muslims were bewildered, not knowing which way to turn. This confusion could not but affect their religious thought also, and there arose several reformers to show a new way. The great divine, Shah Waliullah, attempted to bring Islam into harmony with the new social, political and intellectual trends. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the College which grew into the Aligarh Muslim University and one of the most earnest and purposeful social reformers, set about reassuring his community of the soundness of their faith by trying to prove the truth of Islam with the new scientific and philosophical arguments. Shibli, a great writer and a distinguished scholar, chose the path of leading his co-religionists back to the pristine traditions and, to that end, began a monumental life of the Prophet, *Seerat-un-Nabi*. It

was against this background that Azad grew up and felt the need for a definitive and clear exposition of Islam. His approach was individualistic without being dialectical or controversial. It was the simple approach of avoiding the morass of pedantic learning which had for long centuries blurred the actual message of the Quran and of seeking, instead, to interpret Islam from the Quran itself and from the life and teaching of the bearer of that Divine Message, Mohammad. And for that task the Maulana had been splendidly equipped by his training and his natural gifts.

While his upbringing and training had given him a vast knowledge of traditional literature on the subject, nature had endowed him with a creative and romantic temperament and an objective mind. He thus combined true conservatism with true modernism. He did not set aside the old simply because it was old and he did not adopt the new merely because it was new. He was a conservative and a revivalist, but he wished to revive not institutions or customs but the fundamental message itself; he insisted over and over again on the distinction between religion that is eternal and law that is necessarily ever changing. He was a modern, but he refused to be carried away by new scientific discoveries and new trends in thought. In his exposition of the Quran he pressed into service historical research and made use of the new scientific knowledge, but at the same time he warned that the message of God could not be tested by the ever

limited knowledge of man. Science and philosophy can lead man only so far and no further; the ultimate guide of man must be inspiration beyond philosophy, faith beyond logic. He was modern in the sense that he was utterly objective. He did not start on his quest for truth with any preconceived notions; if he reached faith it was only after traversing the tortuous path of doubt and denial. He was also remarkably free from bias and prejudice; he spent his whole life in controversial politics but his writings betray no sign of any prejudice or bias flowing from his political activities and experiences.

*Tarjuman-ul-Quran* is a translation—alas, incomplete by more than two fifths—of the Quran and also a commentary. Strictly speaking, it contains a commentary only of the first chapter, which has but seven brief verses; for the rest, it is only a translation with interpolations (within brackets to show that they are interpolations) to make the meaning clearer and marginal comments, almost as lengthy as the translation itself, and footnotes to give the context and bring out the meaning fully or discuss some particular points of importance or controversy. The commentary of the first chapter, however, of which this book is a brief summary, deals with all the spiritual teachings of the Quran, the fundamentals of Islam. It also deals with several problems which have been a standing challenge to religious thought, such as Destiny, Freedom and Compulsion and the different conceptions of God. It reconciles the theological conception of God Transcendental

with the mystical conception of God Immanent and does so from the words of the Quran itself: "Reflect on God's creation and not (get lost in arguments about) God's attributes."

It is this firm adherence to the Quran itself and his clear, objective mind which make the Maulana's exposition of Islam so simple and so telling. The reader gets the same feeling that a traveller experiences when a thick mist suddenly lifts and the sun lights up the path which he has been struggling to find and which, he now sees, lies straight in front of him. The light is that of Quran itself and Islam emerges as the simple path that was shown to Mohammad and that remained clear till the mists of theology, mysticism and scholasticism blurred the vision. Islam is not superior to other religions, for all religions are equally true; it is but a reiteration of the eternal message of God and the message of God cannot be truer or superior at one time than at another. Every prophet brought the same message of the unity of God and brotherhood of man; only later did the waywardness of man and growth of mutually hostile groups create differences. Islam once again tried to bring home to men that they were one common, indissoluble brotherhood, with no distinctions of creed, caste, class or colour; it reminded mankind that customs, forms and rituals were necessary but secondary and that of basic importance were only (1) submission to One God, (2) unity of religion and (3) good deeds.

The Maulana stressed these three basic teachings

of Islam and, in explaining their real meaning, turned away from the traditions to which he was born and which so strongly influenced his early life. In effect he raised the banner of determined and uncompromising revolt against religious bigotry and obscurantism but he did so quietly and without the strident fanaticism of a rebel; and to regard him as a rebel would therefore hinder a correct understanding of his temperament and character and of his whole life. The Maulana's approach in all matters was essentially positive; it was never negative. He never raised a mere revolt even in the political field; as an objective and constructive intellectual, he saw the goal clearly and worked towards it with uncompromising determination, unhampered by passion and undeterred by any traditions or beliefs, howsoever firmly entrenched. If, on his journey, he had to sweep aside any tradition or belief he did so without hesitation but also without emotion; it was necessary but purely incidental. His one purpose was to see and present Islam in its true original form, as set forth in the Quran, before the picture got blurred and distorted by "the unduly rigid and impracticable religious dictates and restrictions, the dead weight of unintelligible dogmas, the confusing mass of superstitions, the shackles in which priests and divines held their followers and the chains with which worship of religious leaders and saints kept man's spirit in thrall", which had plagued Islam no less than all other organised religions before it.

The Maulana denounced these burdensome and vicious fetters but not by way of revolt; he only pointed them out as impediments which man must avoid or break through in his quest for truth. Only then can the human spirit attain emancipation and be free to answer the call of the Divine Message. The Quran's simple words, shorn of the far-fetched interpretations of theologians and pedants, once again become crystal clear. 'Submission to One God' is not worship of any man-made good but total and unqualified submission to the one and only Creator and Sustainer of all that is. 'Unity of religion' is not confused by the existence of different religious systems; religion is not confused with the laws, customs and forms that grow round an organised religion to answer the needs of a particular people at a particular time and place and situated in particular circumstances. Just as the concept of justice is one, universal and eternal, though laws differ from time to time and place to place, so it is necessary to distinguish between religious laws, customs and forms, that are and must be flexible and variable, and religion, which is and must be universal and eternal, the same for all mankind at all times, for it is man's everlasting guidance. Similarly, 'good deeds' are not to be understood in the narrow sense as the performance of certain formal duties, important as they may be for man's spiritual and social welfare. Man must go beyond them and do everything, to the best of his capacity and in accordance with his circumstances, to fashion

his whole life to conform to the twin basic concepts of Unity of God and brotherhood of man. One must not serve man except in the service of God, and one cannot serve God without serving mankind.

And so, through his attempt to understand and explain Islam, the Maulana overcame the circumstances of his birth and upbringing, which would have made a theologian and a divine of him, and emerged as a modern intellectual, a steadfast humanist and a man of integrity and faith.

*New Delhi*  
*March 1960*





## *Al-Fateha*

*(Opening Chapter of the Quran)*

*In the name of God, the Merciful, the  
Compassionate.*

*Praise be to God, the Sustainer of the Worlds,  
The Merciful, the Compassionate,  
Lord of the Day of Judgment.*

*Thee (alone) do we worship, and Thee (alone) do  
we ask for help.*

*Guide us on the straight path,  
The path of those on whom Thou hast bestowed  
Thy Grace,*

*Not (of) those upon whom is (thy) wrath and who  
have gone astray.*



## The Significance of 'Al-Fateha' (The Opening)

THE OPENING sura (chapter) of the Quran has been variously referred to as *Fatehatul-Kitab* (the opening of the Book), *Ummul-Quran* (the most prominent in the Quran or, alternatively, the essence of the Quran), *Al-Kafia* (the sufficient), *Al-Kanz* (the treasure), etc. The Quran itself gives a special place to this chapter, for it refers to it thus: "We have bestowed upon thee the seven oft-repeated and the great Quran" (XV: 87).<sup>1</sup> The expression "seven oft repeated", it has been established, refers to this chapter which contains seven verses and which is repeated over and over again in prayers and also on other solemn occasions.

The prominent place given to this chapter is due to the fact that it is not only the introduction to the Quran but also its essence. All that has been stated at length in the Quran about the fundamentals of religion has been said in the seven brief verses of this chapter. If a man is unable to read anything else of the Quran but can master the meaning of these few short phrases, he will have

<sup>1</sup>These references are to the Quran, the chapters being indicated by the Roman numerals and the verses by Arabic numerals. For instance, this reference is to the 87th verse of the 15th chapter.

fully grasped the fundamental purpose of religion and the path to truth and self-fulfilment.

The entire *sura* is in the form of a prayer and its words are so simple and telling that even an uneducated person can understand them and be moved by them. It was with this in view that this chapter was made the central piece of Islamic literature, and it is repeated several times during each prayer and on all other solemn occasions.

What are the fundamentals of true religion? They can perhaps be reduced to the following:

- (a) To have a correct conception of the attributes of God. The errors into which man has fallen in his worship of God have all emanated from his misunderstanding of God's attributes.
- (b) To believe in the law of just returns. Everything in the world has particular properties and a natural effect, and so man's actions also have certain properties and effects; good actions lead to good and evil actions to evil.
- (c) To believe in life after death. Man's life does not end in this world; life will continue beyond it and man will continue to reap the returns of his actions.
- (d) To recognise the path of rectitude and grace.

This *sura*, *Al-Fateha*, sets forth these fundamentals, with incomparable effect, in words which are few and numbered and yet so precise and simple that they make a direct impact on the mind and

heart of the reader. That is as it should be, for the more simply a truth is stated the more convincing it is; nature itself is simple and it is only artifice and ornamentation which make things complicated. So this *sura* says the simplest things in the simplest words. It addresses God by those very attributes whose manifestations surround one all the time, even if one is ignorant or negligent enough not to notice them; it proclaims submission to the Lord of the Universe; it acknowledges His help in everything; it prays for the path of rectitude, avoiding the world's temptations and pitfalls. There is apparently nothing remarkable in all this; it contains no difficult thought or novel idea or esoteric formula. Now that we have been repeating it countless times and its message has been before mankind for centuries, it appears a commonplace; yet, when it was presented to the world there appeared to be nothing more obscure and strange.

Very briefly, this short simple prayer, without entering into any argument or even explanations, sets before mankind in the clearest possible terms the following basic spiritual lessons:

- (1) One of the greatest spiritual errors of man has been to conceive of God as an awesome and terrifying being rather than as Love. The *sura*, therefore, begins with *hamd*, adoration through praise; there is no reference to any fearsome aspect of divinity.
- (2) The first attribute of God referred to is that

of *Rabbil-Alameen*, the Cherisher, Nourisher and Sustainer of the Universe, and it contains two lessons. It tells man of God Who gives him all he needs by way of sustenance, material and spiritual, so that he may protect himself from all evil and proceed to his full development. Secondly, it tells him that God is the God of the Universe, not of any part of it. There is no room left for any narrow-mindedness, prejudice and exploitation, whether individual, tribal, communal, racial, national, religious or of any other kind. His grace and gifts are for all mankind, not for any particular group or any particular religion.

- (3) He is the Lord of the Day of Judgment. Firstly, He is the Supreme Judge; to none else is it given to sit in judgment upon man. Secondly, there is a Day of Judgment or Reckoning. Man must be prepared to face the consequences of his acts, as he expects everything else to have a known, natural and inevitable effect. Thirdly, man should expect only justice, the due result of his acts; God is neither arbitrary nor revengeful.
- (4) In making submission to Him and acknowledging and seeking His help, it is not said merely that we worship Him and seek His help. It is said instead: "Thee (alone) we worship; and Thee (alone) we ask for help." Not only has it fixed the relationship between

man and his Lord, but it has also proclaimed in unequivocal terms the unity of God, and it closes all paths to polytheism, in whatever form.<sup>1</sup>

- (5) The path of profit and grace is described as the Straight Path. The straight path is easier to recognise and follow, and the more one deviates from it the greater the danger of one's going astray.
- (6) Often, however, it is not easy to distinguish which is the straight path. Man is helpless, for the answer to the question is hidden in the womb of the future, and he can but proceed on the basis of his very limited knowledge and very restricted reason. He can then but seek the grace of God and pray: O Lord, direct us on the right path, "the path"—for I know not which it is—"of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy grace, not of those who have brought upon themselves Thy wrath and have gone astray."

<sup>1</sup>Not only that; it bars the path to the worship of might, power and riches to which the frailty of human nature is ever and everywhere an easy prey. Even one who would indignantly deny being a 'polytheist' constantly installs for himself little 'gods' before whom he bows innumerable times every day. This verse, which is perhaps the core of Islam, while enjoining complete submission to God, also raises human dignity and self-respect to the highest possible level; a true Muslim must rely on none but himself and God, and he cannot bow before or seek favours from anyone else.—  
A.H.



## Al-Hamdo L'Illah

*Praise be to God: All that can be said by way of  
praise and admiration is for God*

THE FIRST verse of the first chapter of the Quran opens with *hamd* (praise), just as the very first impress on the mind and instinct of man, when he sets out in quest of God or Truth, is that of wonder and admiration.

The seeker after Truth is described by the Quran as one who "reflects on the creation of the heavens and the earth (with the thought): 'Our Lord! Thou didst not create (all) this in vain'" (III: 191). As he looks around and reflects, his mind is immediately illumined by the realisation that everything within him as well as outside reveals the hand of a Creator of transcendental wisdom and power; the care and bounty of the Creator manifest themselves in every particle of the universe. He is filled with wonder and admiration and he proclaims it with an instinctive exclamation, phrased differently according to the individual seeker's tradition and extent of knowledge but conveying the same homage to the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe; and this instinctive tribute to the Creator saves him for ever from the fatal error of losing himself in the beauty of the created and forgetting the Creator.

The word *Allah*, even before the Quran, was used as a proper noun for God; and the Quran adopted it not only because it had gained currency but also because it was more suitable than any other word.

There was a stage in man's spiritual development when he bowed in adoration before various manifestations of nature; and that, gradually and inevitably, led to idol worship. The number of gods grew, each representing some particular godly quality before which man bowed; and, as the pantheon grew vast and bewildering, man's spirit longed and sought for one supreme god, the lord of all gods. Thus, while there were numerous names for gods, referring to their different attributes, there was always a special word for the Supreme Being. The basic letters of that word, in all Semitic languages, were *Alif* (A) *Lam* (L) and *Hay* (H), and the Arabic *Ilah*, with the definite article (Al), became *Allah*.

As for the meaning of *Ilah*, there are various interpretations, but the soundest appears to be that which derives the word from *alha*, which means astonishment or wonder. (Alternatively, *Ilah* is said to be derived from the word *walah*, which also has the same meaning). There could not be a more appropriate word for the Creator and the Lord of the Universe. However much man may come to know about Him, He remains beyond the range of human knowledge. The more one tries to understand that Absolute Being, the greater is one's bewilderment. The quest begins and ends in wonder and humility. No other name could therefore be used

for the Supreme Being. All other names refer only to some particular attribute of God and, in that sense, are restrictive; but the word Allah immediately directs our mind to a Supreme Being Who is all-embracing, beyond description and beyond cognition.

## Rabbil-Alameen

*Cherisher and Sustainer of all the worlds*

LIKE *Ilah*, *Rab* is also a much used root word in all the Semitic languages. It means, in the most comprehensive sense, to bring up or, in other words, to rear and nurture some living being, whether a plant or an animal or a human being, through its different stages of growth and according to its particular condition and needs till it attains maturity, i.e. that stage of its development when it ceases to need someone to look after it and can find its own wherewithal of life for future progress; and even then the function of the *Rab* does not cease altogether but merely becomes less intense and less constant. The interest, devotion and readiness to guide and help are still there, but they are not seen in constant play as before, because their object has attained a measure of self-reliance and independence. Thus it was that the words *Rabbi* and *Rabbah*, in Hebrew and Aramaic, and *Rabu*, in Old Egyptian and Chaldean, were used for one who brought up, the teacher and also the master.

When a child is born, it is but a helpless lump of flesh and it instinctively cries for a protector and nourisher. The mother fills that role and she fulfills it with boundless love and devotion and never ceasing vigilance and care. According to its changing

needs, she suckles it and gradually feeds it on different food which gives it strength and independence. She carries it in her lap, then supports it when it begins to stand and guides it as it begins to walk till it can run on its own and requires no help or guidance. This is the most perfect instance of 'nurture' or 'bringing up' that man can show. How imperfect and limited it is becomes obvious as soon as one lifts one's eye from that infinitesimal part of existence that is human life and casts it upon that vast and marvellous panorama of existence that includes countless beings and limitless forms of life and that is ever unfolded before one's eyes, if one but stops to see. With no one to teach them how to mother or nourish, one finds animals, birds and insects performing those functions with greater devotion and constancy than even a human mother. There are also creatures beyond perception that have apparently none to nourish them but nevertheless find their nourishment provided for them from the moment they come into existence.

As one reflects on this, one is struck by the fact that not only are all the necessary means of existence and nourishment to be found—that would be nature's bounty—but that they are found arranged in such perfect order that, if man does not disturb it, everything is provided in the form, measure and manner in which it is required. Over and over again, the Quran draws attention to the order and right proportion in which every need of every being is provided for. "Verily, We have created every-

thing in (the right) proportion and measure" (LIV: 49). Air, water and food are the three indispensable requirements of life, and not only are they found in greater quantity than anything else but, among themselves, they are to be found in a quantity which is exactly in proportion to their indispensability, water more than food and air in much greater abundance than either.

Apart from the means of existence and the quantity and proportion in which they are available, one cannot but wonder at the evident order with which the entire universe is organised. Everything appears to have been created and ordered as if with one single object, to create life and to enable it to attain its fulfilment to its utmost capacity. The sun is there to serve as a lamp and an oven and also to lift water and store it in the heavens to be distributed when the need arises. The sun could not, however, perform this last function without the help of the wind, which, with its cool breath, congeals that water into rolls of cloud. The sun then transmits heat to those clouds and makes them melt and yield water to a needy earth. The earth is there to catch that water and, with its help, to bring forth in the right form and at the right time the treasures which it ever stores in its bosom, like a woman's milk, for the furtherance of life; to every seed it offers life and to every plant nourishment, so that they, in their turn, may be the means for continuing and sustaining life. So it is with every particle of existence and in every nook and corner of the

universe. Every force seeks strength and every cause effect, and no sooner do they begin to strive for fulfilment than the entire existence turns to their aid; the sun and the moon, the heavens and the earth, the atmosphere and the elements, it would appear, are all in attendance to help the birth of an ant or the planting of a seed that drops from a farmer's hand.

As soon as a being comes into existence it finds that nature has already prepared the means of nourishment and sustenance for it in the quantity, form and place best suited for that being. Notwithstanding the unparalleled pain of childbearing, the mother is filled with love for the offspring which no devotion can equal; nature has thus ensured continued existence and its flowering. With an irresistible passion, the mother clasps the child to her bosom, and there the child finds its nourishment in sufficient quantity and of the right quality. The milk is at first thin because the child's stomach is weak; but, as its digestion grows stronger, the milk thickens till nature dries it up altogether and thus announces that the child is ready for other less scarce and more suitable nourishment. So it is with mother's love, which is essential for the continuance of existence. Instinctively, it is at its intensest when the new born is but a helpless lump; it diminishes as the child grows stronger till it dies out altogether among the animals and is reduced almost to a memory even among human beings, with their family system.

Another striking aspect of this organisation for the continuance and fulfilment of life is its universality. The same laws apply equally to all beings, whether they are human, animal, vegetable or mineral. A piece of dry stone or a fresh fragrant rose, a tender plant or a lusty child, a humble ant or a proud elephant, an insignificant insect or a mighty man, they are all subject to the same universal cycle of helpless birth, tender infancy, strong maturity, inexorable decay and again helpless death; they disintegrate or wither or die. Different words are used but they imply the same meaning; they are different garbs to clothe the same reality, the same universal process of creation, sustenance, fulfilment and continued existence.

Even more marvellous than the ordered provision of means of sustenance is nature's organisation of the inner capacity of beings to utilise those means of sustenance. But for such inherent and trained capacity, all the means of sustenance would be useless and life would come to an end. Nature has, therefore, so fashioned every being and endowed it with such capacities that it is fully equipped for the conditions and requirements of its environment, for it is in its own environment that it must seek its fulfilment. This adjustment is brought about in two ways, which the Quran refers to repeatedly and describes as *taqdir* (destiny), and *hidayat* (guidance).

*Taqdir* means the proper assessment of something and prescribing a certain state or condition of



existence for it. Nothing can move outside the limits of that fixed state. The planets cannot leave their orbit; the oceans cannot leave their bed; the birds cannot live in water and the fish cannot exist on land; the tropical plants cannot be transplanted in the Polar regions and the Polar bear cannot survive near the Equator. That is the Destiny ordered by a wise and beneficent Maker. Every being is equipped for life within its environment, and similarly every environment is so ordered that its products and effects are according to fixed laws, so that there is stable adjustment between the environment and the beings which exist in it and life is not endangered.

Every step in life is subject to guidance, whether external or internal, of some kind and some degree. In the present context, it is necessary to refer to only that aspect of guidance from the *Rabbil-Alameen* (Cherisher and Sustainer of the Universe) which enables all beings to seek and obtain the means of their sustenance without which all life would cease. This guidance first comes to every being in the form of instinctive revelation and then it lights the lamps of senses and understanding which give man the illusion of power and independence and lead him to imagine that he guides himself. Man has a very short memory; he forgets that when he came into the world it was no human guidance which taught him to cry and make his lungs function or to seek his means of sustenance from his mother's breast. No man told him that his mother's nipple was his fountain of life and no man

taught him to use his jaws so as to suck that nipple hard and thus to drink from that fountain.

This divine guidance, in the form of instinct, is given to every being so that life may go on. Take, for instance, a cat. It is her first experience of pregnancy and yet, without any external guidance, she knows that she is going to give birth to beings like herself and that she must not only suckle them, so that they may live, but also protect them till they are strong enough to look after themselves. As the moment of arrival of these new beings approaches, she knows that the time has come for her to assume the responsibilities of motherhood. She runs hither and thither, frantically searching for a place where her offspring will be safe. She delivers the kitten and forgets everything as she licks them in her joy of fulfilment. They, on their part, have already begun to seek the means of sustenance and blindly grope for their mother's teats. They cannot see and they cannot be helped in their quest by their mother, who cannot, like a human mother, place her nipple herself in the child's mouth. As soon as they find a teat, they suck it with all their strength, as if they knew that their very life depended upon it. Certainly no human or other being on earth taught the cat and the kitten all the varied and extremely complicated vital processes on which the continuance of life depends.

The next stage of divine guidance is that through the faculties of sense perception and mental understanding. Beings 'lower' than man lack intellect and

reason, but they possess the powers of senses and understanding in the fullest measure necessary for all the functions relating to self-preservation and reproduction. These powers, it is also to be noted, are not of the same kind or degree for all beings; to each is given exactly that power and in that measure which would enable it to live in the environment or that particular state in which *taqdir* has placed it. The ant is given a relatively stronger sense of smell; the eagle has relatively stronger sight. It would be irrelevant to examine whether these different faculties of animals and insects were so 'from the first', whatever that might mean, or whether they developed to meet the requirements of the situation. What is to be noted is that these faculties could not have been so developed by any human or other earthly agency; they are Nature-given, and Nature has prescribed the laws of existence, adjustment, growth and development which are unalterable.

Thus it is that, after naming *Allah*, the first divine attribute that this *sura* directs our attention to is that of *Rabbil Alameen*, the Lord Who cherishes, nourishes and sustains everything and guides it to its fulfilment. It was this attribute to which Moses referred when he said: "Our Lord is He Who has given everything its form and nature and then granted its guidance" (XX: 50). The same truth is more fully stated elsewhere in the Quran as: "The Lord Most High, Who hath created and then given order and proportion, Who hath fixed a measure

for every being and then granted it guidance" (LXXXVII: 2-3).

It is this divine attribute of Cherisher and Sustainer of the Universe upon which much of the argument of the Quran is based, and it may be well, before proceeding further, to state that argument briefly.

The first principle of the Quran's argument is an invitation to the intellect to understand and reflect. Over and over again it impresses upon the reader that the only path to Truth lies through intellect and reason. Man must try to understand and reflect upon everything he feels or perceives within himself and outside. "For those of firm faith, there are signs (i.e. signposts of Truth) (enough) on earth and also within yourselves. Will you not see?" (LI: 20-21). "How many are the signs on earth and in the heavens which they (carelessly) pass by and from which they turn away (their faces)" (XII: 105).

If man will but make use of his intellect and reflect on the created universe, the very first truth that will dawn upon his realisation will be the fundamental and universal law of purposeful creation. Everything in the universe is so made that it is subject to a particular law and discipline and part of an ordered system; there is nothing without good reason or a beneficent ultimate purpose. Were it otherwise, there would not have been this universal discipline and order which so carefully, to the minutest detail, holds together everything in the universe in a single integrated whole. "God has

created the heavens and the earth with good purpose. Verily, in this there is a sign for those who believe" (XXIX: 44), and "yet most of them do not know it" (XLIV : 39).

This doctrine of purposeful creation is applied to, among others, the law of reward and punishment. Everything carries with it a particular effect or result, and all such effects or results are immutable. So must it be with man's actions; they too lead to their due results, good or bad, which cannot be avoided. The law of nature which distinguishes between good and bad in everything else cannot ignore man's conduct. "Do they who do evil think that We shall make them as (equal to) those who believe and who do good, equal to them in life and death? (If so,) bad is their judgment. And God has created the heavens and the earth justly, so that every soul should be given a return according to what it has earned. And no injustice shall be done to anyone" (XLV: 21-22).

So it is with life after death. Everything in the universe has a purpose and an end, and it must necessarily be so with human existence also. It cannot be that man, 'God's finest handiwork', was created just to live for a brief while and then be destroyed altogether.

The following, in brief, is the argument of the Quran:

1. When the Quran was revealed, the current

conceptions of God and systems of faith and worship were untouched by intellect and reason and were based, instead, on irrational dogmas. The Quran offered a rational conception for the worship of God.

2. The call of the Quran is basically addressed to intelligent understanding and rational reflection; it particularly invites man to look carefully at everything in the universe and to reflect upon it.

3. If man will use his powers of understanding and reflection he will realise that everything in the universe has been created with a particular purpose and that it is related to the rest of the universe under a superior discipline and order.

4. Once man begins so to reflect on the purposefulness of creation, the scales will drop from his eyes, his mind will shed ignorance, and the path to Truth will unfold itself before him.

Of all the manifestations of nature, the Quran has drawn mostly, for its argument, on the spirit and power of a Supreme Nourisher and Sustainer, which is evident in the organisation of the universe as a whole, in every separate nook and corner and in every single being within it. That the universe should so function that everything in it assists in the fundamental function of sustaining and continuing life, that everything that happens should prove to be a life giving force and, finally, that there should be evident an inherent organisation which takes into account every possible state and circumstance and makes every necessary adjustment can-

not but instil in the instinct of man the assurance that there must be a Lord and Sustainer of the Universe. Otherwise such a perfect and flawless organisation for the sustenance and continuance of life in a wholly intelligent and ordered manner could not be possible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The argument", says a distinguished writer, "that nature shows a design, which cannot have come into being without a creator or God, could so easily be answered by the contrary assertion that there is little evidence of design or order in the universe, that in fact life is continually bursting from the contours of the known world in the most unforeseen and wanton manner; and that whereas the God who created such a universe piled up evil and pain, science and human knowledge seek to limit them. And every atom of intelligence in me was forcing me to accept the evidence which the newspotlight of scientific theories casts on the many inexplicable human problems" (Mulk Raj Anand: *Apology for Heroism*). This argument, if I may say so with all respect, is rather a series of assertions which arise from impatience and which beg so many questions and leave so many hanging in the air.

Is there one instance in the universe of lack of design or order? Is there one thing that happens that is 'disorderly' or arbitrary, that is outside the orbit of the law of cause and effect, that is incapable of being understood and explained by knowledge and intelligence? What is science but the ever growing and yet ever limited effort of man to know, understand and explain the "design or order" which governs the universe? If life appears to be "continually bursting forth from the contours of the known world in the most unforeseen and wanton manner", it is only because our knowledge of the world is still so woefully limited; but, as the frontiers of human knowledge extend, what is

Could such a universe come into existence by itself, without any purpose, will or life force behind it? Is it blind nature, lifeless matter and senseless electrons which have made this perfectly conceived and organised universe, without there being any intelligent will behind it? Can it be that the function of nourishment and sustenance is performed without anyone to perform it, that there is a vast, complicated edifice but no architect, that things damaged are set right again without a repairer, that there are manifestations of mercy but no merciful being, that there are evident signs of intelligence and wisdom

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"unforeseen" and appears "wanton" today is a simple and common fact tomorrow which fits into the pattern of the universe in a perfectly orderly and intelligible manner.

To say that God has "piled up evil and pain" is to give in to anger which clouds reason and perception. God has "piled up" not "evil and pain" but the possibilities of joy and pain, construction and destruction, good and evil, in short of everything that goes to make life. God does not arbitrarily dispense reward and punishment. It has been repeatedly stated in the Quran that had God so willed He could have made man and the universe in a particular pattern; He had but to will a thing and it would be done. He, however, created man and not only provided for him the wherewithal of life but also gave him freedom to act and to put that wherewithal to whatever use he desired. It is for man to use his opportunity well or ill, and whether he extracts good or evil from his environment (to use the word in its most comprehensive sense) is his own responsibility, for it is the result of his acts or omissions. Man is not a puppet or automaton but a free agent. If his freedom is limited by the basic law of cause and effect, that is no limitation but an advantage, for without this certainty he could not in-



without there being a wise intelligence, that there is an organisation without an organiser, a drawing without an artist, a deed without a doer? Man's instinct refuses to accept such a proposition; his reason revolts against it. His nature strives for constructive belief and faith and, in so doing, can pass through but cannot dwell in the barren regions of doubt and disbelief.

The Quran's approach in this matter is not dialectical; it does not propound metaphysical theses and frame logical arguments for them so as to compel an adversary to submission; it addresses itself always to man's natural instinct. According

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crease his knowledge and would be utterly helpless in organising his life; he would ever be a prey to 'accidents'. It is only through the operation of this law of nature that "science and human knowledge seek to limit" pain and evil.

As for "every atom of intelligence in me forcing me to accept the evidence which the new spotlight of scientific theories casts on the many inexplicable human problems", that is as it should be. That is an injunction so oft repeated in the Quran; over and over again man is urged to reflect, to know and to understand. Only on the basis of knowledge and understanding of himself and his environment can man find the 'straight path of rectitude' and attain a full and good life, materially and spiritually. As a further guide to him, the Quran gives to man a code of social and moral conduct so as to help him to live as a good member of the community and a good man, to recognise and live according to that "world of human values, as including facts rather than as opposed to them". That is the divine 'order and design'.  
—A.H.

to the Quran, the sentiment of God worship is ingrained in human nature. If a man is inclined to turn away from it, it is but a lapse on his part, and it is necessary to redirect his attention. Arguments will no doubt have to be used for this purpose but they must be such as will not merely create a ferment in his intellect and reason but will knock at the inner recesses of his heart and awaken his natural instinct. Once his instinct is awake and active, he will need no argument or sermon to take him to his goal. "Man ('s very existence) is witness against himself, however he may seek excuses" (LXXV: 14-15).

"Who provides you with nourishment from the sky and the earth? Who has power over your hearing and sight? And who brings out a living being out of a lifeless one and a lifeless being out of a living one? And who rules and regulates everything (with such discipline and order)?" (X: 31). "Who created the heavens and the earth? Who sends down for you rain from the sky, then causes to grow orchards, full of beauty and delight, whose trees it is not in your power to cause to grow? Is there another god (to be worshipped) besides Allah? (But alas,) there are people who stray from the right path. Say then, who fixed the earth as an abode and ran rivers in its folds and, for (giving) it (balance), placed firm mountains and erected a barrier between two waters (i.e. between oceans or between an ocean and a river)? Can there be any god other than Allah? And yet, (alas,) there are

many that know not" (XXVII: 60-61). "Let man consider his food (and how We provide it). We (first) pour forth water in abundance, then split the earth in clefts and cause to grow therein corn and grapes and nutritious plants and olives and dates and enclosed gardens of thick foliage and fruits and fodder, provision for you and for your cattle" (LXXX: 24-32). "And verily in the cattle (too) there is a lesson for you. From within their bodies, between excretions and blood, We produce milk which is pure and agreeable to drink. And from the fruits of the date-palm and the vine you obtain both strong drink and good nourishment. Therein also is a sign for the intelligent. And, (consider again,) thy Lord inspired the bee to dwell in the hills and in the trees and in the structures (men) put up, and then to suck the juice of all kinds of flowers and to follow the directions of its Lord till there issues from within its body a drink of diverse hues, wherein is healing for men. Verily, herein is a sign for those who reflect" (XVI: 66-69). The argument can go on into infinity, for His mercy and the signs of Truth are infinite.

From an all-pervading Providence, the Quran proceeds directly to the unity of God. To whom can man bow in adoration and submission but to the Lord, Who cherishes and sustains the entire universe and Whose limitless bounty and mercy one acknowledges with every beat of one's heart? "O mankind, reflect upon Allah's grace. Is there a creator other than Allah who gives you sustenance

from the heavens and the earth? No, there is no God but He" (XXXV: 3).

The argument naturally leads also to the need, for man, of a moral code, of revelation and of a messenger from God. It is not possible that the Lord, Who has provided every necessary thing for man's material well-being, should not also have provided a discipline and order for his spiritual sustenance and progress. The spirit has needs just as much as the body, and it cannot be that God should provide all the wherewithal for the development of the body but nothing for that of the spirit. When the earth is parched and cannot feed man's body, Providence sends down rain from the heavens. Can it be that the same Providence has no life-giving drop for the soul? Does it not follow, therefore, that when mankind is spiritually thirsty and starved, Providence should again be merciful and send down from the heavens guidance to refresh and revitalise the spirit and reveal to it the path of its sustenance and development? If it causes no astonishment that rain descends and revives dead earth, why should it cause any wonder that revelation descends and quickens dead souls to life? It would be a poor reply for the modern science-minded man to say that he can see one but not the other. "Surely, they make no just estimate of God when they say: He sends down naught to man (by way of revelation)" (VI: 91). "He it is Who has set for you stars that you may guide yourselves with their help through the dark spaces of the land and

the sea. Verily, for those who know, We have set forth Our signs in plain terms" (VI: 97). There are nevertheless people who refuse to see and understand. They accept the gift of the stars as a matter of course but refuse to accept that God has also created other 'stars' for their spiritual guidance.

The next step in the argument leads to the doctrine of life after death. The greater the care and trouble taken in making a thing the greater must obviously be its intended utility and the more important the purpose it is designed to serve. It does not, therefore, stand to reason that man, the most developed and most carefully and delicately fashioned being among all God's creation, should have been created but for a brief fleeting existence of eating and drinking, toil and merrymaking, without a further end and a higher purpose. "Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you would not be brought back to us? Allah, the True King, is far above (such a purposeless act)" (XXIII: 115-116).

Man is the last and most perfect link in the chain of creation and has been fashioned after millions and billions of years of unceasing growth and development. All that has taken place on the earth since that immeasurably distant point in the past when this planet came into separate existence has been, as it were, but preparation for the making of man, as he now is. Is it conceivable that all this effort of ages is to end in a flicker-like life for this man? To look at it from another point of view, if animal life has in

the past been passing from one stage of evolution to another and changing form accordingly, there is no reason to assume that the process of evolution has come to an end and that there are no new forms of life in the future. If, in the past, innumerable forms and shapes of life have disintegrated and disappeared, giving birth to new forms and beings, there is no reason why the present life also should not disintegrate and disappear, to be followed by another and higher form of life. "Does man think that he will be left aimless (without purpose or future)? Was he not a drop of fluid emitted, then a clot and then shaped and fashioned in due proportion?" (LXXV: 36-38). The Lord, Who has eberished, nourished and fashioned man through innumerable stages and forms will surely not leave him suddenly but will continue to raise him to higher stages of development. Man may be the most perfect form yet created on earth, but he is still very far from being a perfect creation.

## Ar-Rahman-ir-Raheem

*The Merciful, the Compassionate*

THE TWO words *rahman* and *raheem* are akin, alike in their root and in their meaning, but they are not the same. The root word is *rahm*, and the Arabic word *rahmat* means mercy but in a comprehensive sense which includes the sentiments of kindness, compassion, love, bounty and favour. It is in this sense that both words mean 'merciful'. The difference between them can be fully appreciated by only those who are conversant with the Arabic language. These are two forms of the same adjective, one which indicates a passing quality and the other which denotes that the quality is a permanent distinguishing mark of the person to whom the adjective refers.<sup>1</sup> *Rahman* means 'merciful' in the former sense and *raheem* in the latter sense. Both the words are together used here in order to emphasise this divine attribute from which, in a sense, flow the other attributes and without which the world could not exist. "My mercy embraceth all things" (VII: 156).

When we look at the universe around us, the first

<sup>1</sup>Illustrations of the first form are *atashan* (thirsty), *hairan* (bewildered) and *sakaran* (intoxicated) and of the second *azeem* (great), *aleem* (a person of knowledge) and *hakeem* (wise).—A.H.

thing that strikes us is the functioning of some force organised for the sustenance of all beings. Reflection leads us to another stage of knowledge, and we see that there is a force even greater than that of sustenance, that of improvement.

This whole set-up of life and motion would not have come into existence if it did not carry within it the quality of correction and improvement. But why is it that nature is essentially constructive not destructive, bringing about order not disorder and making for improvement and progress not deterioration and retrogression? Human knowledge and reason have not been able to answer this question; they can only say that this constant constructiveness and improvement are due to the adjustment of the primeval elements and to an inherent balance and proportion in matter. To the further question, however, as to why there should be this balance and proportion in nature, why matter should have these characteristics or why the elements should come together in the right proportion and a balanced order, man's knowledge and intellect have no answer to give, except to say lamely that the 'law of necessity' demands that nature should be both constructive and selective, that not only should there be construction but good construction. There is no answer at all to the further obvious question as to why there should be such a law, why everything should be according to 'need' and why the 'need' should be construction and good order and form, not destruction and disorder. Philosophy can



take us no further, but the Quran offers guidance and says that nature is merciful and it is the quality of mercy always to better not to worsen.

We see from each and every thing around us that all acts of nature have separately the characteristic of being systematically and uniformly useful, and together they make it appear that the entire universe is organised for our benefit, to fulfill our needs. "Allah is He Who has created the heavens and the earth and causes water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits for your food. And He has made the ships subject to you, that they may traverse the oceans by His command. And He has subjected to your service the rivers and also the sun and the moon, constantly pursuing their courses, and the night and the day. He has granted you all that you require and if you would count His gifts you could not reckon (His bounty)" (XIV: 32-34). "We have placed you upon earth, with power to make use of it, and have provided for you there (all) the requisites of life. Little do you render thanks (for these gifts)" (VII: 10). "Verily, man is given to injustice and ingratitude" (XIV: 34).

No matter how restricted and uncivilised the life of a man may be, he cannot be ignorant of the fact that he derives all kinds of benefit from his environment. A woodcutter in his forest hut, as he looks around, cannot but be aware of how that forest ministers to all his needs. When he is ill, the forest provides him with health-giving herbs; when the sun is hot, the trees offer him shade; when he has

leisure, he can refresh himself with the soothing scenery of the forest and the pleasing colours of flowers; the trees, which provide him with fruit while they are young, supply him with planks of wood when they are mature and with fuel when they are old.

Nature's bounty is also universal; it ministers to the needs of every creature at the same time. If a rich man in his proud palace can feel that the world is for his benefit, an ant in its humble hole can make the same boast. Is not the sun there to provide warmth for the ant, rain to provide moisture, wind to carry the smell of food to it and the earth to furnish it with abode in every difficult climate and circumstance? Who dare deny it, and who can reject a similar boast by any other creature, for nature tends to all equally and "God's mercy embraces all things"?

It is true that the world is also a place of strife and disturbance. There is, along with construction, destruction and, along with consolidation, disorder. This apparent destruction, however, is only a step towards construction and improvement, just as a sculptor breaks and mutilates a stone in order to produce a beautiful figure. No building can be constructed without first 'destroying' or 'spoiling' many things, such as stone, earth, steel and wood. The comfort and peace of a home are obtained only after a great deal of hard labour and the discomforts of dirt, noise, etc. So it is with nature. Oceans in storm, rivers in flood and volcanoes in eruption, the snows

of winter, the scorching winds of summer and the dark clouds and the inconvenient and even destructive rains of the monsoon are, all of them, uncomfortable and unwelcome, and yet they are all necessary for the continuance and betterment of life; without them there would be no new life and the old life would wither away.

Perhaps the greatest gift of nature's bounty is its all-permeating beauty. Nature not only creates and gives form; there is also beauty in everything it creates and shapes, whether one looks at creation as a whole or at its several aspects individually. The twinkling stars and the brilliant sun, the ethereal moon and the vast sky, the kaleidoscopic clouds and the refreshing rain, the rolling oceans and the running rivers, the high mountains and the deep valleys, the scented gardens and the singing birds, the smiling dawn and the shy evening, they all bear witness to nature's desire to create and spread beauty, to make every corner of the world a delight for the eye, a joy for the ear and a very heaven of peace and content for the soul. There are no doubt manifestations of nature in which one fails readily to observe beauty. One finds, for instance, beauty in the song of a nightingale but not in the crowing of a raven. One forgets, however, that music cannot be made with a single note, high or low. "There is not a thing (in the universe) which does not (in its own way) hymn His praise, but you do not understand their (several) hymns" (XVII: 44).

Human knowledge and intellect have failed to

answer the question why there should be not only construction but beauty in the world. The Quran answers that it is because God is *rahman* and *raheem*, that He is merciful and His mercy is ever active. We are so engrossed in the artificial comforts of life that we overlook the far greater comforts provided by nature. So it is with the all-pervading beauty of nature. We ignore it, but life would be intolerable if it was devoid of beauty or if we were without a sense of beauty.

It is a universal failing in man that he does not value a thing until he has been deprived of it. Water is not valued on the banks of the Ganga but man would soon realise its value if he had to do without it even for a day. Similarly, we do not care to leave our bed in the morning to witness the miracle of dawn, because morning comes every day in all its glory. We do not appreciate the moonlight and its transcendental beauty, because it has become a part of routine, and we stay in closed rooms, but we would be in a desperate state if the moonlight were to disappear from our life. Only those in a cloud-laden cold region can realise what a great boon the rays of the sun are. Only a bed-ridden sick man can appreciate fully how much the sight of a clear blue sky means in life.

It seems inconceivable that anyone should consider himself poor and deprived who has the supreme gifts of light and colour, fragrance and music. The gifts of nature are indeed so great and numerous that it is impossible to count them or

describe their fullness. Nor does nature content itself with dispensing external beauty alone; it also endows its creatures with an inherent balance which awakens the faculties of sense and understanding in animals and lights the flame of intellect and reason in man.

How this comes about is a secret of nature which defeats human comprehension. How does a particular arrangement of matter yield an abstract quality that is beyond matter? How is it, for instance, that the insignificant material body of an ant, with a brain hardly larger than the size of a pin point, contains within it such enormous powers of perception and understanding, diligence and perseverance, organisation and discipline, arrangement and balance, construction and improvisation? The only possible answer is that it is a quality of Divine Mercy to create beautifully and to give its creation not only external beauty but also internal excellence.

The beauty and excellence of existence, with its continuous progress, could not, however, last if it did not also possess an irresistible force which preserves what is good and eliminates what is not. This force is that of natural selection, and we refer to it as "the survival of the fittest". The Quran, however, refers to it as "the survival of the most beneficent". The quality of mercy in nature demands that what is beneficial should increase and what is harmful should diminish. That is the true meaning of natural selection. "He sends down water from the

sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure, and the flood bears away (the dirt and litter in) its swelling foam. And so from that which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools rises a foam like unto it... As for the foam, it passes away as scum upon the banks, while that which is of benefit to mankind remains in the earth" (XIII: 17).

There is mercy not only in the principle of natural selection but also in the manner in which it operates. The laws of nature are unalterable, and because they are inexorable they appear to the superficial observer as pitiless. That is, however, not so, for nature is essentially lenient and forgiving; it aims at reform and improvement, not destruction. It acts not arbitrarily and suddenly but systematically and gradually, so as to give us ample opportunity to prepare and adjust ourselves. Life and death are not sudden unforeseen events but gradual processes, with clear warnings at every step. That is true for men and plants and also for all natural phenomena, such as day and night. It is to this divine mercy that the Quran refers when it says: "If Allah took mankind to task (at once) for that which they deserve by their conduct, there would not be left a living creature on the surface of the earth; but (in His mercy) He reprieves them for an appointed term" (XXXV: 45).

Another aspect of Divine Mercy is that even hardship assumes an attractive character. Man's life is one continuous struggle for self-preservation and

advancement, and it is thus full of heavy responsibilities, great hardships and severe trials. At the same time nature has imbued man with such desires and ambitions, sentiments and enthusiasms that every corner of life is alive with activity and interest, and it is this zest for life which not only makes every living creature bear all the hardships of life but also makes those hardships a source of interest and pleasure. The greater the hardships and exertions, the keener is the pleasure derived from them and the more interesting and attractive one's life. If life was devoid of hard labour and challenging trials it would also be deprived of all interest and joy and would become dull and unbearable.

This is true of all mankind, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, learned and uneducated, strong and weak, healthy and sick. Their circumstances are different, their natures, activities, interests and objects are all different, but they are equally interested and engrossed in their various pursuits, and it is impossible to say for whom life is more interesting, meaningful and attractive. A woman goes through excruciating pain and mortal danger to give birth to a child and then bears endless hardship to nurture that child. Nevertheless, so compelling is the instinct of motherhood that every mother gladly suffers it all and finds her supreme happiness in self-effacing devotion and service to the child. She sacrifices her blood to produce milk for the child, and the sacrifice brings her not pain but exultant joy of self-fulfilment; giving up her

life blood, she feels not poorer but richer. And thus countless separate individuals are bound together by ties of blood and sentiment, ensuring not only the continuity of mankind but also its progress through consciousness of community and co-operative endeavour.

Nor is it only kinship which gives life its interesting and attractive character. Differences make a contribution no less important. Man's nature is such that it soon tires of same or even similar things and seeks variety. This variety is to be found in all the creatures and phenomena of nature, in time and season, day and night, summer and winter, land and water, hills and plains, green forests and arid deserts and then again within each kind. Every animal is different from another in shape and form and in all other respects. Every plant differs from another in size and shape, in colour and smell, in taste and in all its other properties. So it is also with minerals and all material objects.

Another aspect of this natural law of difference is what may be called the law of pairs. Everything is in pairs; there is nothing odd. For every night there is a day, for every evening there is a morning, for every masculine being there is a feminine match. It is this law of nature which has divided mankind into two sexes and filled them with such instincts of action and interaction, sensation and emotion that one sex has a natural and irresistible attraction for the other, and it is this mutual attraction which leads to and sustains a complete social life. This is



so, says the Quran, in order that there may be love and contentment and that partnership and comradeship may render the labours and trials of life easy and bearable. "He created for you helpmates from among yourselves that you might find rest and peace in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo! herein are indeed signs for those who reflect" (XXX: 21). And from this relationship between man and woman flows a series of other relationships which link the past with the future generations, projecting the individual far beyond himself and linking him with others of his kind in an ever widening circle.

This law of difference is also evident in the different stages of man's life, from infancy to old age, and also in his manifold desires, sentiments and emotions, thus giving variety and sustained interest to life. It is also evident in the different stages of social development; they not only enrich human life by their variety but also goad man to fresh activities and enterprises and thus not only turn the rigours of his labours into pleasures of effort and joys of fulfilment but also ensure human progress. In accordance with His wise and beneficent plan, God "has made you successors on the earth (of those who went before you) and has exalted some of you in rank above others, that He may try you by (the test of) that which He has given. He is indeed swift in punishing (misdeeds), but verily He is also forgiving and merciful" (VI: 165).

Just as the Quran argues from the facts which

clearly reveal the existence of a Nourisher and Preserver, so it also repeatedly argues from the equally clear manifestations of Divine Mercy. Since in everything we see not only an organisation and order but also signs of grace and mercy, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there must be a gracious and merciful intention and force behind it all. "Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the difference between night and day, in the ships which run upon the sea for the profit of mankind, in the rain which God sends down from the sky, thereby giving life to an earth that is dead, in the beasts that He disperses upon the earth, and in the ordinance of the winds and the clouds which trail obediently between the sky and the earth—(in all these) are signs for those who understand" (II: 164).

Divine Mercy manifests itself further in the beauty and perfection of all creation. The appropriateness and right proportion of everything around us call for reflection and it is impossible to resist the conclusion that it has not all happened haphazardly but that there is a purposeful force behind all creation and that that force is a merciful one. He "hath created the seven heavens in harmony, one above another. No want of proportion will thou see in the creation of the Beneficent, Most Gracious. Look again. Canst thou see any flaw? Then look again and yet again. Thy sight will return discomfited and worn out, (without being able to detect any rift or flaw)" (LXVII: 3-4).

It is from this quality of mercy that the Quran also argues the inevitability of a life hereafter—"Do they not understand that God, Who created the heavens and the earth, has power to create (men) like them (anew)?" (XVII: 99)—and the need for divine revelation. The Quran asks how it is possible to imagine that the Mercy and Grace which manifest themselves in every nook and corner of the universe and have provided everything necessary for the physical well-being of man have nothing to offer for his inner guidance and spiritual benefit. So it is that revelation, the gift of the Book and the assignation of prophets are referred to over and over again as a mercy from God. "This (the Quran) is the light of clear reason and a guidance and mercy for those who helieve" (XLV: 20). "O mankind, there has come to you an exhortation and direction from your Lord, a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts, a guidance and a mercy for believers" (X: 57). "And before this (the Quran), (there was) the Book of Moses, a guide and a mercy" (XI: 17). "And we sent thee (Mohammad) not but as a mercy for all the creatures" (XXI: 107).

In the material world we see the constant operation of the natural law of selection. What is it but a manifestation of God's mercy, which preserves what is beneficial and eliminates what is harmful, such as scum and froth? The Quran uses, in this connection, the terms 'true' and 'false' (or 'vain'), for the true remains and the false is eliminated, and this applies not only to material things but also to

man's inner life. "We hurl the true against the false, and it does smash its head, and lo! it (the false) does perish" (XXI: 18). This is the unalterable law of nature, and if we do not see it clearly it is only because of our shortsightedness.

The effect inevitably follows the cause, though the process is sometimes so gradual as to be almost indiscernible. When heat is applied to water, the latter does not boil at once, but boil it does if heat is applied to it in sufficient intensity and sufficiently long. If the heat is reduced or withdrawn before the water reaches the boiling point, what appeared to be inevitable will be warded off and the water will return to its original low temperature. So exactly it is with man's conduct. The sure results do not reveal themselves at once but they follow inexorably, unless man's conduct alters before the process has gone too far. In other words, both in material and spiritual matters, man is given plenty of time and numerous chances to reform and find the right path. If one would but reflect, this apparent delay in the working of the law of cause and effect, of deed and desert, is but the leniency of Divine Mercy. Another way of stating the same truth would be to say that man is given the opportunity to derive the fullest benefit from this life and to enrich it by his conduct.

So it is that the code of religious belief and conduct which the Quran presents to man is based entirely on mercy and love, for man's spiritual life is not separate from but an integral part of the

natural order and the entire basis of that order is Divine Mercy. There are over three hundred places in the Quran dealing with mercy, and if we take into account the passages dealing with the other related attributes it can be said that the Quran is, from the beginning to the end, nothing but a message of Divine Mercy.

This emphasis on the quality of mercy is a pointed message of God to man, for man is, in a manner of speaking, God's 'viceregent' or 'shadow' on earth. His very nature and existence demand that he should cultivate divine qualities and practise them in his relations with fellowmen, and the most fundamental divine qualities are those of justice and mercy. The Quran does not enjoin on us to love our enemies, for that would be unrealistic and contrary to human nature, unacceptable to the instinct of self-preservation and also inconsistent with the conception and requirements of justice. It does, however, repeatedly and pointedly urge us to temper justice with mercy, for that would be an act both of grace and spiritual advancement and of enlightened self-interest and it would also be the surest way to reform the wayward offender. "If you punish, then the punishment must be exactly similar and in proportion to the injury done to you; but if you can restrain yourself and be patient, it is best for you" (XVI: 126). "Whoever forgives and (thus) mends matters shall receive his reward from God" (XLII: 40). "Good and evil cannot be equal. If you return good for evil, you will see that your enemy

will become your bosom friend; but only those of you can attain this height who have the capacity for self-restraint and patience" (XLI: 34-35)—"those who can master their anger and pardon the faults of fellowmen—and God's love is only for those who do good to others" (III: 134).

Note: At this point the author has taken occasion to deal at length with the misconception that the teaching of Christ was contrary to human nature and inconsistent with the Quran. For the sake of continuity, I am refraining from summarising it. The burden of the argument, however, is that the misconception has arisen from giving too literal an interpretation to an injunction stated in a beautiful and arresting form. It is an unwarranted reflection on one of the greatest teachers of mankind to imagine that any precept of his is contrary to human nature and incapable of being practised by men generally. It is also a denial of the basic position taken by the Quran that it is nothing but a reiteration of the Divine Message which was given to mankind by an untold succession of Prophets, including Jesus Christ. "Nothing is said to thee (O Mohammad) but what was said to the apostles before thee" (XLI: 43). It is to be further remembered that over and over again the Quran sternly warns against any tendency to discriminate among Prophets, giving to one a higher position than to another. "Say: We believe in God and in that which is revealed unto us and in that which was revealed unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and in that which was given to Moses, Jesus and (all the) Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them" (II: 136 and III: 84).—A.H.

## Malik-i-Yaum-id-Deen

### *Lord of the Day of Judgment*

THE NEXT attribute of God which is referred to is that of justice, and He is addressed as the Lord of the Day of Judgment.

The current religious beliefs had invested God with the characteristics of an absolute and moody monarch who, when he was pleased, showered gifts all around him or, when he was displeased, inflicted dire punishment. Thus arose the custom of offering sacrifices to appease God's wrath and win His favour. The Quran's conception of God, however, is not that of an arbitrary ruler who governs according to his moods and whims. On the contrary, the law of divine reward and retribution is a natural law and merely another form of the law of cause and effect which has universal application. We see its operation in the physical world around us all the time and should therefore have no difficulty in understanding its operation in relation to our spiritual conduct. If we understand that the quality of fire is to burn, that of water to cool and that of poison to kill, and if when we sow wheat we are certain that what we shall reap can be nothing but wheat, how is it possible to imagine that the 'harvest' of a good deed can be anything but good and that of an evil act anything but evil? So it is that the Quran frequently

uses the word 'earn' for human conduct. "Every person is bound to the consequences which his deeds have earned" (LII: 21). "For every one is only what he has earned, and he shall have to answer for only what he has earned" II: 286). This message is frequently reiterated and it is made clear that if man is asked to do good and avoid evil, the object is not to appease a wrathful God but only to avoid self-injury and self-destruction and to attain grace and salvation. "Whoever does good it is for his own benefit; whoever does evil it is against his own soul. Thy Lord is not a tyrant to His servants" (XLI: 46). Man's limited intelligence has often failed to understand natural 'calamities' and attributed them to the wrath of a terrible God, and thus fear and error wrongly came to be associated with the conception of God. These 'terrible' manifestations of nature are in reality a manifestation of Divine Mercy, for if nature did not provide such correctives justice would be disturbed and the entire existence would be disorganised. It is not an arbitrary rule that makes destruction, in some measure and form, an essential prerequisite to beautiful construction. So, just as man needs the protection of God the Preserver and the grace and bounty of God the Merciful, he cannot do without the divine quality of justice, which makes for organised good life and eliminates, or at least minimises, the elements of harm and mischief.

What is justice but the avoiding of excess? There should be neither too much nor too little; hence the



use of scales as the emblem of justice. What is existence but the coming together of certain elements in exactly the right proportions? What is body but physical matter in right proportion? Good health depends upon moderation in the sense that there is not too little nor too much of anything which contributes to the existence of the body; any slight deviation leads to sickness. Similarly, beauty is a state of moderation and correct proportion. It is this which makes the human form beautiful and a flower attractive, shapes a building into a Taj Mahal and transforms sound into music. We see the same law operating throughout the entire universe. The planets have their place and movement fixed by a correct balance between their respective gravities. If that balance were to be disturbed by ever so little the planets would crash into each other. "He raised up the heavens without visible supports" (XXI: 10). "And the firmament has He uplifted, and He has set up the balance (of justice)" (LV: 7). If the entire universe is based on this balance of justice, it cannot be that human thought and action are outside that law. "Do they seek any other than the religion of God, while all creatures in the heavens and on the earth submit to His will, willingly or unwillingly?" (III: 83). Contrariwise, the Quran refers to every misconduct and evil as a departure from justice or balance or proportion.

This attribute of justice completes the Quranic conception of God, and if it is mentioned after His attributes as the Preserver and the Merciful, it is to

indicate the natural stages in the development of man's thought and his search for truth and reality. It is a Preserver that man's existence needs most visibly and immediately and to whom his thought turns first. Once this need is fulfilled and the conception of a Preserver firmly fixed, human thought moves forward and perceives the mercifulness of the Preserver. With the recognition of the Preserver Who is also Merciful, man moves on to the last stage in his search and realises that there is an all-pervading Justice, without which indeed both Preservation and Mercy would be incomplete and defective.

## *Iyyaka Naabudo wa Iyyaka Nastaeen*

*Thee (alone) do we worship, and Thee (alone) do  
we ask for help*

WITH THIS verse starts the second part of the *sura*. The preceding verses were an invocation, calling to or addressing oneself to God by some of His most characteristic attributes. And now starts the prayer; but the prayer begins with a final statement of the place of God in one's spiritual life and one's own position in relation to God.

This verse is perhaps the core of the *sura* and the core of the teaching of Islam. If one but fully understood and acted upon the teaching implicit in this verse alone, one could become a Muslim in the fullest sense of the term.

The basic conception of Islam is the unity of God. This conception is common to many religions, but the peculiar contribution of Islam is the emphasis upon and the full development of this conception. The Quran does not merely say that we worship God or that God is entitled to our worship. It goes further and says that it is God alone Whom we worship and Who is deserving of worship. The unity of God is thus finally and firmly established and

*Note:* This chapter does not occur in the original. It is based on an oral explanation given to me of this verse by Maulana Saheb and was approved by him.—A.H.

worship of anyone other than the One God is barred once for all. A common form of worship is to bow and to place one's forehead on the ground. The Quran restricted this to worship of God alone and severely forbade its practice in relation to anyone else. That those who call themselves Muslims do prostrate themselves today at the tombs of saints all over the world is merely a sad commentary on how far we have strayed from the teaching of the Quran and what a sorry and distorted picture of Islam we present to the world.

The conception of Unity to be found in different religions of the world can be classified into three kinds:

- (1) 'Unity of Being'. God is one and unique.
- (2) 'Unity of Worship'. God is entitled to worship and we must all bow before Him.
- (3) 'Unity of Attributes'. Not only is God one and entitled to worship, but all the attributes through which God manifests Himself belong to Him alone and none else shares those divine attributes. To make anyone else share any of those attributes with God is to give God partners and to destroy His unity.

Unity of the first two kinds was found in all the older religions, but the third kind was peculiar to Islam. By emphasising the Unity of Attributes, the Quran perfected the conception of Unity. Many gods were worshipped but there was also allegiance to a Supreme God. It did not occur to one to ask how it was possible to worship more than one god because

the Unity of Attributes did not form part of the conception of Unity. This was the case with Arabs also before Islam was revealed to them. If they were asked who created the world and the heavens they had no hesitation in replying that it was Allah. Nevertheless they also worshipped not only numerous gods but also men in high spiritual authority, not because the latter were gods but because they were the 'go-betweens' through whom alone one could reach God. Just as one could not approach a king directly but had to go through several other persons, it was felt that there must also be channels for approaching God. These channels or sponsors were referred to as angels among the Semitic races and as gods among Aryans. Men in high authority, saints and priests, who were supposed to be the means of communication with God, were also considered worthy of worship. The Quran, by emphasising the Unity of Attributes, swept aside all these notions and proclaimed that man needed no sponsors or intercessors to reach his God; He answers all who call upon Him with a true and faithful heart.

It is therefore not only unnecessary but a denial of the Unity of God and of Divine Mercy and Guidance to beg for any spiritual help except from God. There often comes a time in one's life when one has exhausted all avenues of material assistance and feels helpless. It is at such times that man instinctively calls upon gods, angels and saints for help and comfort. The Quran says that such assistance must be asked for from God and from no

one else, for to do so would be to make others share the attributes of God and to lose the basic conception of the Unity of God.

Whatever may be the degenerate practices in the Muslim world today, the Quran strictly forbids such appeals for help to any god or angel or intercessor, and Mohammad himself proclaimed over and over again that he was but an ordinary being, like everyone else, and no more than a mere messenger of God, as there had been innumerable messengers before him. Just before his death also he uttered a severe warning against worship of his grave. And a reminder of this was given dramatically by Abu Bakr, Mohammad's successor as the head of the Muslim community, when Mohammad died. Even those who should have been fully enlightened by their long association with Mohammad were naturally prostrate with grief and desolate. Abu Bakr himself was no exception, but he also realised the danger to the young Muslim community from an undue feeling of helplessness at the loss of the leader, who was Prophet. He therefore pulled himself together and addressed those present. "Let him", he said, "who worshipped Mohammad know that Mohammad is dead; and let him who worshipped God remember that God will never die".

*Note:* If I may venture to add a word, I should like to state my own understanding of this verse, which I regard as the most complete summary of the Quran's spiritual teaching. It is pregnant with meaning and an eternal beacon for human conduct. It is a constant guide in man's everyday

life, a constant reminder not only of man's duty to God but also of his duty to himself; the two duties are really complementary and inseparable, for they emanate from the same fundamental outlook on life. While it teaches us complete submission to and dependence upon God, it also forbids submission to and dependence upon anyone else. "We install not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God" (III: 64). "If God is your helper, none can overcome you; and if He withdraws His help from you, who is there, after that, who can help you? In God (alone), therefore, let believers put their trust" (III: 160).

This does not mean that one must not submit to or obey the socially constituted authority—that would be indiscipline, which is destructive not only of social progress but also of self-development—or that one should not seek any help from others, for without mutual help and 'give and take' no society could exist. What I understand this verse to mean is that, while submitting to properly constituted authority by way of intelligent discipline, one must not bow before others passively from fear or for some ulterior motive; one should not *worship* authority, power or wealth. It is necessary to add that one's obedience to the various authorities in society must always be subject to one's supreme duty and complete submission to God. Secondly, while one must necessarily seek help from others, it should be by way of social co-operation in which one not only takes but also gives; one must not *beg* favours and, even when one depends upon others one must be basically self-reliant. It is in this sense that I regard this verse as the final statement of man's relationship to God and also as the irrevocable and inalienable charter of human dignity and self-respect.—A.H.

## *Ihdinas-Siratal-Mustaqueem*

*Guide us on the straight path*

IT HAS already been indicated that the divine attribute of the Preserver carries with it also the essential quality of Guidance, for without the guidance of nature no being can sustain itself. This guidance is the last gift of nature to enable every creature to get on its feet. "The Lord Most High, Who has created and then bestowed order and proportion, Who has fixed a measure for every thing and then granted it guidance" (LXXXVII: 2-3).

There are three stages of guidance. The first is that of instinct, which is present even in a new-born babe; no sooner is he born than he begins to cry for food and then, without any external instruction, sucks at his mother's breast to find it. The second stage is that of the senses, which give us the faculties of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, and it is through them that we acquire knowledge of the external world. These two stages of guidance are for animals also, but for man there is yet a higher stage, that of intellect. It is this guidance which has opened for man the gates to limitless progress and has given him the highest place in creation. All these three stages of natural guidance have their well defined limits and cannot go beyond them. Instinct makes us aware of the needs of life and



gives us the faculty of striving for the fulfilment of those needs, but it cannot enable us to acquire knowledge of the world outside our own being. That function is left to the senses, but senses too can only take us thus far and no further. The eye, for instance, sees but only under certain conditions; if there is no light or the distance is too great, we cannot see any object even though it is there to see. Our knowledge, therefore, remains imperfect, and there is need for deducing knowledge through reasoning from cause and effect and framing rules and principles of universal application. That is the function of intellect, but intellect too can guide us only up to a point, and beyond that there is need for further guidance. Just as the word of senses is strictly limited, so also are there definite restrictions which intellect cannot break through. Intellect is confined to the limits imposed by the senses, for it can function only within the limits of such knowledge as we can reach through the five senses. What is there beyond the world of senses? Intellect is itself lost in wonder and can guide us no further.

Moreover, intellect is hardly an adequate or effective guide in practical life. Man is so pressed by desires and emotions that when there is conflict between reason and emotion the victory is very often with the latter. How often are we warned by reason to refrain from an act that is harmful or even fatal and yet are unable to resist the emotions which persuade us to that act! The most powerful arguments of reason cannot keep us from losing

control of ourselves when in anger or from eating something harmful when compelled by hunger. If, therefore, He Who sustains and tends us has equipped us with senses, so that we may guard against instinct leading us astray, and endowed us with intellect, to correct the errors of the senses, does it not follow that He must have provided us with something else also to afford us guidance when intellect is exhausted and helpless? The Quran answers in the affirmative and says that this fourth stage of guidance is that of revelation or divine inspiration. "Verily, it is for Us (to give) the guidance" (XCII: 12).

"The path of divine guidance is *Al Huda* (The Guidance)" (II: 120), the path of true and universal guidance. This guidance, like the guidance of instinct, senses and intellect, is alike for all, without distinction of race or creed, time or place, and any guidance which is confined to a particular group or which seeks to divide mankind into different groups is false. There is but one true path; the universal path for all mankind and the Quran calls it *Islam*, i.e. unqualified and complete submission to God. This is the cardinal principle on which the entire teaching of the Quran is based.

"(To begin with,) mankind was but a single community, but then differences arose" (X: 19). Originally man led a natural life and there was no difference or clash with his fellowmen. Gradually, however, mankind multiplied and its needs grew; giving rise to differences, clashes of interest and

then open struggle, exploitation and oppression. The common life of harmony and content gave way under the growing stresses and strains; men came to hate each other and the strong oppressed the weak. When this happened, it became necessary to provide right guidance for mankind and to ensure that justice and truth should prevail. So it was that there was a succession of Divine Messengers who brought and affirmed the message of God. "And so God sent Messengers (one after another) as bearers of good tidings (to those who did good deeds) and as warners (to those who were wayward), and He sent with them the Book with truth so that it may set at rest the differences which had arisen among men" (II: 213). This guidance was not confined to any particular race, community, time or place. "There was never a people (in the world) without a warner having lived among them" (XXXV: 24).

It is sad to reflect that men at different times and in different places have appropriated to themselves the exclusive privilege of divine guidance and have believed that their own religion was the only right religion and their religious leader the one and only true Prophet or bearer of God's Message. The Quran has over and over again stressed the universality of divine guidance and grace and proclaimed that there have been countless Messengers of God in various places and at different times and that it is not right to discriminate between them. "For every people (there has been) a guide" (XIII: 7). "For every people (was sent) a Messenger" (X: 47).

"We have sent (O Mohammad) (a number of) Messengers before thee, among them those of whom We have told thee something and others of whom We have not told thee anything" (XL: 78).

The law of nature is throughout the same, in every corner of existence, and so is divine guidance the same for mankind throughout the ages and in every corner of the earth. That universal path is submission (Islam) to the One Lord of the Universe and living a life of right action. Every religious leader always invited men to follow the one common religion and to avoid differences and factions.

God created all men alike as human beings but they divided themselves into groups and factions on the basis of race, colour, language, nationality, etc. Mankind was thus divided and sub-divided by innumerable artificial differences. There remained but one single relationship, one sacred bond which still held mankind together and which could unite them again in spite of all differences; this, as every Prophet or Messenger of God pointed out, was the common worship of the One God. No matter how we may differ from each other, our God cannot be different; no matter what our race, colour, country or nationality, when we bow in submission before the same God, all our earthly differences disappear and we feel as if the whole world is our home and the entire mankind our family; we are all children of the same Divine Father. Hence it was that the teachings of all Messengers of God were basically the same, con-

firming each other, and the Quran professed to do no more than confirm and reiterate the teachings of all the Prophets gone by. "(O Mohammad), to thee We have sent the Book with the truth, confirming the (message contained in the) Books sent down before it" (V: 48).

It may be asked why, if the founders of the various religions all taught the same basic principles, differences grew up between religions. The Quran explains that these differences are of two kinds, those which the followers of various religions have themselves created, through having turned or strayed away from the real teachings of those religions, and those genuine differences which are to be found in the canons and practices of those religions as, for instance, in the form of worship. These latter differences pertain not to the real teaching or spirit of a religion but only to forms and externals. They are but a secondary part of religion and such differences are both inevitable and necessary.

The object of religion is reform and welfare of mankind. This object can be fulfilled only in the context of the prevailing conditions and circumstances, which differ from time to time and from place to place. It is necessary, therefore, that the code of conduct must be such as to suit the circumstances of the time and place and the social fabric and intellectual capacity of the people for whom the code is evolved. This is, however, no more important than the physical and social differences which dis-

tinguish one people from another and has no bearing on the essence of religion. It is a sign of a people straying away from true religion when they begin to attach primary importance to such differences of form and practice. The Quran has repeatedly warned against this and set forth before man clearly what constitutes true religion. "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces (when worshipping) to the east or to the west; but righteous is he who believes in God and the Last Day and God's angels and the Book and the Prophets, and shares his wealth, for the love of Him, with kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, the wayfarer and those who ask, and (spends it) for setting free those in bondage, and is steadfast in prayer and sets aside the prescribed portion of his wealth for charity and is true to his word and remains firm and patient in tribulation and adversity and in times of fear and stress. Such are the people who are true and God-fearing" (II: 177). This is the definition of true religion and the picture of a true believer, be he called a Muslim or by another name, which the Quran placed permanently on record nearly 1400 years ago.

When the Quran was revealed to the world, religion had been identified with forms, practices and rituals, and every group looked upon followers of other ways as not only inferior beings but also beyond salvation; they alone were the true followers of God and His chosen and beloved. It was this misguided arrogance and blasphemy which the

Quran set out to correct by distinguishing between the principles and forms of religion and directing attention to the essence of religion. "We have set for each (group) of you a particular code and path. Had God so willed, He could have made you one people, but He tests you by the separate regulations which He has made for you (according to your different circumstances and capacities). So (do not lose yourselves in these differences but) endeavour to surpass each other through your good deeds" (V: 48).

It follows, therefore, that one's attitude towards followers of other religions must be one of broad-minded and understanding tolerance. It is a frailty of human nature that every group regards its own ways as the best and cannot look at them through the eyes of its critics. The only right course for man, therefore, is one of patience and tolerance.

"(O Mohammad), if the Lord had so willed, all men on earth would have joined the faith (but, in His wisdom, He left them free to choose their path according to their own understanding). Wouldst thou then compel people to accept the faith?" (X: 99). "And do not revile those to whom they pray besides God, lest they, in their ignorance, revile God out of spite. (Remember) We have made each people's ways and doings appear alluring to them. In the end they will all return to their Lord, and We shall then tell them the truth about their ways and deeds" (VI: 108).

It was this division of mankind into so many

exclusive and mutually antagonistic groups which made the message of the Quran necessary. There should otherwise have been no need for the revelation of the Quran, since the object of all religions was the same and they were all founded on truth. While, however, all religions were true, their followers had strayed from truth and it was, therefore, necessary for a fresh divine call, which was the Quran, to bring all mankind together again to the eternal but long lost truth.

The Quran enumerates, repeatedly and at some length, the errors into which followers of the various religions had fallen. One of the greatest errors was forming separate groups and developing a spirit of narrowminded clannishness and faction. This evil grew to such proportions that every religious group forgot the object of religion, ignored the fundamental teachings of religion, disregarded faith and conduct and considered only whether a person affirmed allegiance to that group or to some other. Irrespective of his faith and deeds, a person was supposed to be doomed if he belonged to another group and was assured salvation if he joined that group. This naturally led to bigotry and mutual hatred, and the path of religion was turned into an avenue for prejudice, enmity, malice, oppression, slaughter and beastliness. Even places of worship, dedicated to God, were destroyed because they were identified with a group other than one's own.

The Quran, therefore, recalled men to true religion and reminded them that:



(a) man's salvation depends not on his belonging to a particular group but on his own right belief and right action;

(b) God's religion is the same for all mankind, and to forget this unity and universality of religion and to form mutually antagonistic groups is to stray from the right path altogether; and

(c) the essence of all religions is to worship directly the One God, the Lord of the Universe. This is what was taught by every founder of a religion. " (Be it) those who believe (in the Quran) or those (who call themselves) Jews, Christians or Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and whose deeds are good shall receive his reward from the Lord, and for him there shall be no fear and no grief" (II: 62).

So it was that the Quran explicitly and repeatedly warned men that it did not invite them to form a new group but instead called upon them to sweep away all artificial differences and factions and reunite into a single brotherhood as God intended them to be. The Quran says that it has brought no new religion but is merely a reiteration of the divine message that has come to mankind so often through various Prophets in different lands from time to time. "He has ordained for you (O Mohammad) the same religion which He enjoined on Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus" (XLII: 13). "(O Mohammad), We have sent thee inspiration, as We inspired Noah and all the Prophets who came after him, as We inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac,

Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus, Joh, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and as We gave to David the Psalms, and (as We inspired) the Prophets about whom We have told thee and those about whom We have not told thee" (IV: 163). "They are those who received God's guidance. So thou too (O Mohammad) follow their guidance" (VI: 90).

It is, therefore, essential that we must accept all the Prophets. It is not possible to accept one or some of them and to reject the others, for they all brought the same Message. To differentiate between the various Prophets is to lose the right path. "Those who deny God and His Prophets, who seek to make distinction between God and His Prophets and say: 'We believe in some of them and do not believe in others' and who wish to adopt a separate path in between (faith and unfaith); such are the people who are in truth unbelievers" (IV: 150).

The Quran did not, therefore, ask men to accept a new religion but instead called upon them to act honestly in accordance with the true teaching of their own religion. "O People of the Book! You shall have naught (of religion) until you observe truly the teachings of the Torah, the Gospel and all that has been revealed to you from your Lord" (V: 68).

The basic teachings of all the religions were the same and the Quran merely reiterates them; it enjoins those actions which are universally acknowledged as right and forbids those actions which are universally considered wrong. It is this universally

recognised path of rectitude which the Quran calls upon man to follow, and all other paths and diversions which lead to differences and divisions he is told to avoid. This true path, this common religion of all the Prophets, is referred to in the Quran as Islam, because it holds that the essence of religion is submission (*Islam*) to God and the law He has made for man's conduct in the same way as there are laws of nature for every other being in existence. "In the eyes of God there is but one religion, and that is Islam (submission to His Will and Guidance). If then they dispute with thee (O Mohammad) in this matter, say: 'My way and that of my followers is to submit to God and we have bowed in submission to Him'. And say to those who have been given the Book and those who are unlearned: 'Do you (too) submit yourselves (to God)?' If they do, they have found guidance (and there is no further cause for argument). If they turn away, thy duty is only to convey the Message to them, and God sees everything regarding His creatures" (III: 19).

It may be well at this point, for a clearer exposition to recapitulate the argument of this chapter briefly.

(1) When the Quran was revealed, the position was that religion was regarded no more than as a basis of group organisation in the same way as social groups were formed on the basis of race, clan or family. Every religious group considered truth to be its exclusive preserve; everyone within the group

was assured of salvation and everyone outside was doomed to perdition.

(2) In every religious group, religion had come to be identified with outward practices and rituals, such as form of worship, sacrificial customs, eating or abstaining from certain articles of food, etc. Salvation depended upon the observance of these practices and customs.

(3) Since these practices and customs varied from religion to religion, every group considered the religion of another group as devoid of truth.

(4) Since every religious group not only believed its own religion to be true but also considered other religions to be false, it necessarily led to bigotry, hatred and bloodshed.

(5) The Quran, therefore, placed before mankind once again the universality of true religion.

(a) It declared that all religions were true and that religion was a common gift of God to mankind, not confined to any one group.

(b) It proclaimed that, like all laws of nature, the law of man's spiritual fulfilment was also the same for all and that the greatest error of followers of religion was to divide themselves into mutually hostile groups.

(c) It explained that God's religion was intended to unite mankind, not to divide them.

(d) It went on to explain the difference between religion and religious regulations and customs. While religion is the same for all, regulations and customs vary according to the require-

ments of social groups in different places and at different times.

(e) It further explained that the externals of religion and the customs of religious groups had no bearing on man's spiritual advancement and salvation. These groups are man made, while God given religion remains the same and consists only of right faith and right action.

(f) Finally, it proclaimed in unequivocal terms that its message was no more than that all religions were true but that their followers had turned away from their true teachings. The common true core of all religions is referred to by the Quran as *Deen* (the religion) or *Islam* (submission to God).

(6) Man has shattered all bonds that could unite mankind into a single community or brotherhood. There was but one race, but it has been split into thousands of races; there was but one nation, but it has been divided into innumerable nations; all men were of one status, but there are now countless classes of rich and poor, high and low. There is but one single bond which can again gather together the scattered and divided family of man; and that is common worship of the One God. The realisation that we are all creatures of the same Lord, that our Cherisher and Sustainer is the same, can reawaken that sentiment of relationship and unity which will conquer and transcend all man-made differences.

## Conclusion

LET US now, by way of summing up, consider this opening chapter of the Quran, *Al Fateha*, as a whole and see what spiritual lesson or guidance it contains for mankind. It is a prayer which is offered several times daily. What effect is it likely to produce on the emotional, intellectual and spiritual development of a man who repeats it so often, day and night, not only with his lips but from his heart?

Such a man loses himself in adoration of God, Who is not the God of this or that race, nation or religious group, but the Lord of the entire universe, the Cherisher and Sustainer of all mankind, Whose mercy, therefore, extends to all beings alike. This not only makes him humble before God but, at the same time, also gives him a sense of dignity and self-respect, for he too is the object of Divine care, and a feeling of oneness on terms of equality and brotherhood with the rest of his fellow creatures. He calls to God by His attributes, and the attributes which he most readily recalls are those of mercy and justice.

He immediately bows his head in reverence and gratitude and offers unqualified allegiance to the one God. He says: "It is only Thou before Whom I bow in worship, and it is Thee alone to Whom I look for support and sustenance". Having thus offered Him his whole allegiance and entrusted him-

self to His exclusive care and protection, he can no longer bow before anyone else; he no longer fears any person on earth and he neither can nor need stretch his hand before anyone else for a favour.

He then goes on to make but one prayer to his Lord, and that is to be able to follow the straight path, the path not of any particular race, nation or group but the path that is common to all religious leaders and all upright men of all times and all countries. He prays for guidance so that he may not go astray with those, irrespective of their race, creed or nationality, who are misguided. He prays for grace so that he may be able to attain good that is universal and to avoid evil that is universal.

Such a conception of religion cannot but so mould the heart and intellect of its devotee that his worship will be for the One God, Whose mercy and beneficence are universal, he will be at once self-respecting, humble and charitable and he will be free of all faction and narrowminded group mentality; he will belong not to this or that race, community or group but to mankind; he will be a man, and his allegiance will be to humanity. This is the call of the Quran, the real spirit of its message.







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